

Brief Descriptions of ICADS Field Course Independent Projects

In the final four weeks of the course, students conduct a research or academic project with an ecological or sociological focus. Below is a short list of the sites and organizations where past Field Course students have conducted their research projects. While this list is designed to allow you to develop a general idea of a research project that you would like to conduct, the specifics of your study will be developed during the course with the assistance of the course professors and collaborating individuals and organizations. Remember that the following is only a partial listing; it by no means lists all of the locations where or organizations with which you can conduct your research. Students are encouraged to formulate other projects, the range being quite broad, depending upon each course's specific schedule.

Costa Rican Politics and North-South Trade Relations

- ◆ Examination of the influences of U.S. import policies on Costa Rican export production
- ◆ Study of IMF and World Bank policies and their effects on Costa Rica
- ◆ Influence of Costa Rican international trade policy on small-scale farming

Education

- ◆ The influence of gender on career opportunities for high school students in rural communities
- ◆ Anthropological study of high-school students' future ambitions and how schooling defines these future ambitions
- ◆ Teaching practical issues in schools: alternative agriculture techniques, composting, recycling, etc.
- ◆ Relationship between environmental education and environmental activism
- ◆ A comparison of urban and rural high school drop out rates

Economic Studies

- ◆ Economic comparison of traditional blackberry production and sustainable management in a cloud forest ecosystem
- ◆ Analysis of transportation costs for a small rural co-op producing charcoal for sale in San José
- ◆ A case study of the economic viability of an independent Costa Rican banana cooperative
- ◆ Application of new valuation techniques taking into account social, ecological and economic components of human and natural resource management
- ◆ Conventional multinational companies vs. alternative non-conventional markets
- ◆ The study of market feasibility for the sale of fish as a supplement to the income of a mangrove/charcoal co-op

Community Organization

- ◆ Community participation in a long-term, sustainable development project: the organization of a community organic farm
- ◆ The economic and social importance of a widespread, small-scale, low-input, traditional bean production system
- ◆ The preparation of a grant proposal to fund the construction of a community house for a women's organization
- ◆ Participant observations in the process of forming a federation of 17 rural community organizations

Forestry Studies

- ◆ An analysis of the sustainability of a forestry management project involving tree extraction
- ◆ The impact of a natural forest management project on the lives of local residents

- ◆ Study of the economic sustainability of a fallen tree harvesting project in the Osa Peninsula
- ◆ A comparison of the health of a logged versus un-logged forest using birds as an indicator species

Water

- ◆ The effects of urbanization, deforestation and road construction on river health
- ◆ The study of land use effects on rivers and subsequent repercussions on marine life
- ◆ Erosion and sedimentation load in rivers within a forest management project
- ◆ The effect of two coffee farms – one organic, one traditional – on insect diversity in rivers

Soil Studies

- ◆ Development of indicators of soil quality in relation to reduced intensity of agricultural production
- ◆ Comparison of alternative methods of ecosystem/soil restoration
- ◆ Compost studies
- ◆ Land-use capacity studies

Traditional & Alternative Agriculture

- ◆ Agroforestry systems: biodiversity in coffee plantations with shade trees
- ◆ Organic agriculture: pest and fertility management
- ◆ Studies of the impact on soil characteristics of pasture land and low-input basic grain production
- ◆ Medicinal plant production, use and marketing
- ◆ The design, function and economic analysis of a home garden production system
- ◆ A study of seed saving techniques used in an isolated rural community

Ecological Studies

- ◆ The frequency of use of a biological corridor by small mammals in a tropical dry forest
- ◆ Diversity of mushrooms in the Talamanca Mountains
- ◆ Regeneration and germination patterns of oak trees in the cloud forest
- ◆ A comparison of bird species diversity at forest edges and near-forest sites

Human Rights

- ◆ Study of women's rights from a historical perspective of laws
- ◆ Description of the process by which indigenous people are induced to give up their land to mining companies and subsequent loss of cultural integrity
- ◆ Investigation of intellectual property rights issues affecting the resources of indigenous communities
- ◆ A study of the Costa Rican child adoption system

Energy Studies

- ◆ Study of using solar heated water for a biological station in the cloud forest
- ◆ A study of the impacts of a large scale hydroelectric project
- ◆ Alternative energy supplies; solar ovens; alternative methods and materials for building houses

Eco-Tourism

- ◆ The economic viability of eco-tourism in a rural community (e.g. with respect to trout fishing, birding, camping, etc.)
- ◆ Study of the feasibility of a community managed eco-tourism project and potential for other commonly managed resources
- ◆ Community-involved development of a self-guided trail for tourists and community members
- ◆ The effects of tourism on communities, their culture and the environment